



American Federation of Government Employees
(AFGE) Local 3607
P.O. Box 1616
Denver, CO 80201-1616
Phone: (303) 312-6547 FAX: (303) 312-7812

June 13, 2005

Re: Open letter; CHEERS and pesticides human subjects testing concerns

Dear Administrator Johnson:

Thank you for making the EPA Denver, CO Region 8 office your first regional office visit since your appointment as EPA Administrator. Region 8 employees appreciate your efforts to personally engage with staff, and your public characterization of Region 8 staff as "world class experts" at the new EPA building groundbreaking ceremony.

However, your comments about EPA's recent cancellation of CHEERS (Children's Health Environmental Exposure Research Study) during your June 2 "all hands" meeting aroused serious concerns in many Region 8 employees and the Union, for two reasons. First, in answering a question about EPA's role in environmental education, you characterized the cancellation of CHEERS as an unfortunate result of public misunderstanding. Clearly, you are aware that Region 8 personnel with children's health and pesticide expertise have raised objections to CHEERS, as have many other EPA scientists. The Union would like to take this opportunity to let you know of our interest in creating a culture at EPA where critical thought and discourse is encouraged. Further, we'd like to remind you of our Union's role in protecting the rights of whistleblowers.

The second reason your comment raised concerns is that you advanced the claim that CHEERS was ethically and scientifically sound. The CHEERS study would have examined how infants absorb pesticides from exposure to "high indoor pesticide use," over a two-year period. CHEERS participant recruitment materials included the unqualified claim:

"You and your child will not experience any risks from participating in this study."

To claim that exposing infants to heavy pesticide use in the home poses no risk is disingenuous at best. In fact, EPA used developmental risks to infants as the rationale for canceling registrations for residential use of organophosphate pesticides included in CHEERS. The CHEERS "no risk" claim directly conflicts with EPA's rationale for canceling the residential pesticide registrations and EPA's policy goal to minimize children's pesticide exposures.

Protecting the environment by protecting EPA employees

The "no risk" claim also seriously undermines the credibility of informed consent of CHEERS families. While CHEERS targeted current pesticide users, EPA's offer of \$970 and a video camera to low income families to participate in CHEERS certainly has the appearance of paying families to expose their children to pesticides. Dismissing these concerns as a communications failure is offensive and damages EPA's credibility.

The Union is not opposed to EPA conducting scientifically and ethically sound human exposure studies. We do not believe CHEERS met these standards. The federal standard for scientific and ethical human subjects research conduct is the Common Rule, which EPA has only partially adopted. If EPA does plan to conduct additional human exposure studies on children and infants, the Union believes EPA should formally adopt Subparts B and D of "the Common Rule" (40 CFR Part 26), which protect pregnant women, newborns and children, as soon as administratively possible.

In your remarks to employees, you highlighted Congressional concerns related to CHEERS. In light of the concerns raised at your confirmation hearings, the recent EPA appropriation rider prohibiting studies with deliberate human pesticide exposure, and the interests of protecting EPA's scientific integrity, I have taken the liberty to share this letter with interested elected officials. I look forward to your response in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "David Christenson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

David Christenson,
President